

An unsuccessful attempt at a bibliography of New Zealand newspapers

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No adequate bibliography of the newspapers published within New Zealand's shores during its 150 years of European settlement has been produced; nor, for that matter, has a comprehensive bibliography of periodicals published in this country yet appeared. Such bibliographies are essential tools which must be compiled to a high level of accuracy and comprehensiveness before any adequate history of the book trade in New Zealand can be written. They will also quickly become indispensable for many other areas of New Zealand studies. Compilation of a newspaper bibliography was considered 60 years ago to be an essential first step towards a history of the New Zealand book trade, and it was accepted even at that date that its compilation would be difficult because the sources were rapidly becoming distant.

To date there have appeared several works which go some way towards a New Zealand newspaper bibliography and history. Guy H. Scholefield's *A Union Catalogue of New Zealand Newspapers* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1938) was primarily a finding list, even though it contained more bibliographical information than is strictly required by a location guide. Its two successors (its second edition in 1961, and my *Union List of New Zealand Newspapers Before 1940, 1985*)¹ are similarly more concerned with locations than with bibliographical matters. The only attempt at a history of the New Zealand newspaper trade is Scholefield's *Newspapers in New Zealand* (Wellington: Reed, 1958), still surprisingly comprehensive but marred by numerous errors, uncertainties and omissions.² Scholefield probably had access to material collected for an early attempt at publishing a newspaper bibliography, which had arisen from the initiatives of the publishing trade, rather than of librarians or book collectors whose efforts have in this country produced the major retrospective bibliographies. Papers relating to this early attempt are extant and enable some of its progress to be recreated.

A 'Bibliography of Journalism'

On 23 March 1921 Archdeacon Herbert W. Williams, himself no mean bibliographer,³ wrote to the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of New Zealand:

It has frequently occurred to me that it is much to be regretted that there is no bibliography of journalistic publications in N.Z. Dr. Hocken mentions a few — very few — of the leading journals, but apparently considered that the matter did not come within the scope of his activities. If the enterprise is much longer postponed, the compilers will be faced with grave if not insuperable difficulties in the prosecution of their search for information. I would venture to suggest that the subject is one in which the N.P.A. might naturally be interested. The Association might perhaps set up a small committee

to begin collecting material while men with the lengthy journalistic experience of Sir G. Fenwick and Mr. H. Brett are still available.

I need hardly point out that the compilation of such a bibliography would form a frame-work upon which there could ultimately be built up an exhaustive history of journalism in N.Z. — that it is in fact almost indispensable [*sic*] as a prerequisite for the writing of a history which should not be much longer delayed.⁴

Although no published bibliography of New Zealand newspapers and other 'journalistic publications' (did Williams intend this to include all periodicals?) resulted from this suggestion, the Newspaper Proprietors' Association acted promptly on it and their records, together with those at the Alexander Turnbull Library, enable their commendable attempt to be described.⁵

Williams's proposal was considered by the General Committee of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association on 14 April 1921.⁶ They established a committee to 'consider the subject of a Bibliography of Journalism as suggested in a letter from Archdeacon Williams', appointing to it Sir George Fenwick, H. Brett and F. Pirani, three men who between them had a total of over 150 years of experience in the New Zealand newspaper world.⁷ With Fenwick and Brett in control of the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Auckland Star* respectively, it was a potentially influential group.

Fenwick and Brett

The Committee began its task rapidly. Fenwick, assuming the chairmanship, wrote promptly to Brett to ask for his views. Fenwick's opinion was that

it is not merely a question of obtaining the names of newspapers that have appeared and disappeared from the scene in years gone by, but it involves the saying of something about these newspapers, their politics, characteristics, and so forth.

He suggested that a staff member more junior than Brett would no doubt do the major part of the considerable amount of work involved. Brett apparently answered that, although willing, he would not be able to address the matter for some weeks owing to the pressure of work, to which Fenwick replied on 9 May 1921 that 'there is really no hurry. The compilation of the bibliography will take a good few months'. Another letter to Brett from Fenwick, on 12 May 1921, welcomed Brett's decision to contribute and noted that the chairman had already begun compiling lists of newspapers by examining the Dunedin Supreme Court registration records.⁸ A further letter written only one day later informed Brett of several references to writings about early New Zealand newspapers which Fenwick had seen at the Hocken Library.

Records of the Committee's activities (or rather the activities of Fenwick and perhaps Brett: Pirani appears not to have contributed) have not been located for the rest of 1921. On 22 February 1922 a report was submitted to the Association's General Committee, who noted only that it had been 'received & deferred for further consideration'. This report survives in a draft sent by Fenwick to Brett for comment on 12 January 1922. A 'certain amount of preliminary work' had taken place, primarily in compiling lists of newspapers from Supreme Court records, and work 'has been very largely confined to Dunedin.' Specimen entries for two Dunedin newspapers were attached. The Committee recommended that the Association prepare and publish the work. This report was submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Association on 22 February 1922 and was commented on by members present at the meeting. The minutes record that Dr Scholefield, at that time editor and a director of the *Wairarapa Age*, 'suggested that it should be a history of journalism in New Zealand with a bibliography attached'. Mr Dinwiddie, editor of the *Hawke's Bay Herald*, proposed that any data collected should be kept at the Association's office to ensure its availability in the event that it was not published, and Mr Selig, general manager of the Press Company, Christchurch, suggested that members of the Association be asked to supply information.

Format of entries

The specimen entries submitted with the Committee's report are probably those now held by the Turnbull Library in the form of proofs, and suggest what the bibliography may have been like. Each entry gives information about registration from the Court records and is followed by a long paragraph relating some of the history of the title, with an emphasis on personnel. A brief preface notes the paucity of records of newspapers before registration was required in 1868 and describes the nature of the information given by the Court records.

Records of actions taken during the next year have not been located. A major step towards completion was the implementation of both Selig's and Dinwiddie's suggestions made at the Annual Meeting. A General Committee meeting of 20 February 1923 recommended that a committee be established 'to draft a form for the purpose of gathering information from the newspaper offices for filing in the N.P.A.' By 16 April planning for this was well advanced. Sir George Fenwick, in a letter to the Association's Secretary, L. J. Berry, commented on a form letter to be sent out to newspapers throughout New Zealand and attached to his letter a sample form. This sought information about title, place of publication, frequency, name of proprietor, date of first issue, name of first proprietor, and, for leading papers, changes in proprietary and 'an inch or so of comment.' It can be seen from this that no great degree of bibliographical sophistication or completeness was envisaged by Fenwick. Brett, however, thought differently. In a letter to Berry dated 1 May 1923¹⁰ he disagreed with Fenwick's suggestion that a small amount of comment on the leading dailies would suffice. He had already received enough material from the *New Zealand Herald* to fill eight pages, and newspaper proprietors in the smaller towns, 'such as Gisborne,

Napier, and other places', had sent him large quantities of material about their papers.

Progress, and delays

It therefore appears that by the middle of 1923 a considerable amount of material had been collected. This progress was sufficient for Sir George Fenwick to consider that the bibliography should be published in the near future, for he supplied a draft of an introduction to Berry on 24 September 1923; no copy has been located. In his letter acknowledging its receipt Berry noted that there had been a poor response to the Association's request for information, that another request would be sent, and, perhaps rather pointedly, that there was as yet no firm commitment on the part of the Association to publish the bibliography. A chase-up letter dated 9 October 1923 was sent to newspapers who had not responded to the earlier calls. The information being sought was 'the name of the paper, name of proprietor, and any changes in same ... A short summary of its history and characteristics may be added. ... those supplying the return should exercise every care to secure absolute accuracy.' A list headed 'Sent To', dated 9 and 10 October 1923, notes 64 papers, including five we would now consider to be periodicals of a more specialised nature, for example, the *N.Z. Trotting Journal* and Taihape's *Main Trunk Whistle*.¹¹

The bibliography's progress is next noted in the minutes of a meeting of the General Committee on 31 October 1923 where it was reported that 'much of the data ... was now in hand'; but despite this positive statement the matter was held over until a later meeting. No further mention of the bibliography appears until the General Committee's meeting of 10 July 1924, which resolved 'that Mr. Selig be approached with a view to preparing this Bibliography at a fee to be arranged.' It was reported at the next meeting of this Committee (22 October 1924) that Selig had agreed: 'he would favourably consider the matter when the Committee decided to put the matter in hand.'

The Committee, sadly, never did make the final decision to publish the bibliography. On 24 February 1925 the matter was referred by the General Committee to an Advisory Committee, where it must have been allowed to quietly fade away. No further mention has been located until 1929, when the General Committee considered a letter from Dr Scholefield, by then Parliamentary Librarian. The text of this letter is unknown but appears to have suggested that the Association again consider publication of the newspaper bibliography, for the Association's Secretary was directed to estimate the cost of publication and the number of copies required, and — perhaps of most interest to the Association — to 'ascertain the ... possibility of getting a government subsidy & assistance of Government Printer.' As before, there was no positive outcome and no publication was issued.

Scholefield

Dr Guy H. Scholefield had been involved from the start, as we have seen in 1922 and 1929. As a former newspaperman he was obviously keenly interested in any newspaper bibliography, and as chief librarian of

the General Assembly Library he had paid special attention to the newspaper collection. It is therefore not surprising that the minutes of the 1938 Annual General Meeting (17 February) state:

it has been decided to proceed with the publication of a 'Bibliography and History of the Press in New Zealand.' The work would be compiled by Dr. G. H. Scholefield, Chief Parliamentary Librarian, and a Committee had been set up to supervise the work. This decision was in direct response to a suggestion made by the Department of Internal Affairs that the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, in order to celebrate the Centennial in 1940, prepare and publish 'a history of New Zealand newspaper progress over the hundred years.'¹²

Scholefield set to work. A form letter dated 10 January 1940 noted the difficulty of gaining information for the period since the 1923 questionnaire had been sent out, and asked for specific information. Scholefield had widened the scope of the work since the earlier date, and in addition to the information solicited then now sought answers to questions such as 'When did you abolish handsetting and what type of setting machines did you introduce? What machines have you now for the paper and how many?' Detailed information about kinds of printing presses used and about dates on which buildings were erected was also requested.

This attempt was also ill-fated. The intervention of war curtailed many Centennial projects, among them this one. It is not recorded what prompted the Association's General Committee to recommend on 22 Septem-

ber 1949 'that Dr Scholefield be asked to bring his "History of the Press" up-to-date' for a sum of twenty guineas. Scholefield must have refused this derisory offer, for the Committee on 1 March 1950 asked for an opinion from C. W. Earle, the Association's immediate past president, on the amount of work required to update the history. The last mention of this work in the Association's records is on 19 September 1951, when the General Committee noted a letter from Scholefield offering to revise and update the history for a fee of £200. The Committee recommended

that Dr Scholefield be advised that as there is little possibility of the publication of the History of the Press, there would be little purpose in having it brought up-to-date at present.

With this ended the involvement of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association. That Scholefield's history appeared in 1958, issued by the commercial publishers A.H. & A.W. Reed, says much for the author's perseverance. It contains a foreword signed by S. D. Smith, the Association's President, which gives no background about the book's beginnings in the bibliography. The author in his preface noted the work's origins in Williams's suggestion and recounts only a little of the ensuing history, giving a slightly different version from that shown in the Association's records.

Lessons for today

This saga of an attempt which was only partially successful would not be worth recounting if an adequate bibliography of New Zealand newspapers had been

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produced. Sadly, however, none has appeared, despite a widespread recognition that newspapers are an extremely important source for the study of New Zealand's early history.¹³ What, then, can be learnt from this unsuccessful effort? It is intriguing to know that information was collected and collated in the 1920s and, later, in the 1940s, but unless these records are still in existence and can be located this knowledge is of little practical value. The lesson must surely lie in the warning that the compilation of such a bibliography, considered 60 years ago to be indispensable before an adequate history of the book trade in New Zealand could be written, and seen even then as difficult because the sources were rapidly becoming distant, will be even more complex today. Moves should begin as soon as possible to instigate and place on a secure footing a project to produce a retrospective bibliography of New Zealand newspapers, preferably as part of a larger project to list all periodicals published in this country. The publication in 1985 of the fifth volume of the *New Zealand National Bibliography to the Year 1960*¹⁴ was a significant bibliographical event, one which should be followed by a project to list New Zealand periodicals. Dr A. G. Bagnall, the compiler of this work (which lists only monographs), has long considered that it was only one part of a complete national bibliography:

A bibliography of books and pamphlets is but one section of a full national bibliography — doubtless the most important, but certainly not the only one. Eventually there will need to be bibliographies of our serials, including newspapers, maps, music and other material. Work on these ... will certainly

occupy librarians and others for at least another fifty years.¹⁵

The National Library has the infrastructure to incorporate such an undertaking, but has it the foresight and sense of responsibility to New Zealand's bibliographic past to divert a small part of its resources to this project? For the encouragement and advancement of New Zealand studies, let us hope that it does.

References

1. Wellington: Government Printer, 1961; Wellington: National Library of New Zealand, 1985.
2. For example, it abounds with such phrases as 'a few months later'.
3. *His A Bibliography of Printed Maori to 1900* (Wellington: Dominion Museum, 1924) is notable even now for its accuracy and comprehensiveness.
4. Documents referred to are from Turnbull MS Papers 1837, which consists of correspondence, mainly from Fenwick, concerning the projected bibliography. It is not complete.
5. I am grateful to Mr Patrick K. Greene, Executive Director of the Newspaper Publishers' Association, and Mrs T. Connolly-Brown, Association Secretary, for permission to examine the minute books of the Association and for their assistance.
6. Quotations from minutes of meetings of committees of the Association are taken from the various minute books held by the Association.
7. *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, edited by G. H. Scholefield (Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1940).
8. The Printers and Newspapers Registration Act, 1868, required that all newspapers be registered by depositing an affidavit with the nearest Supreme Court Registrar.
9. This and following biographical information is taken from *Who's Who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific*, 3rd ed. (Wellington: Rangitira Press, 1932).
10. The letter (actually a copy) is unsigned but its content makes clear by reference to Fenwick and to a letter from Berry dated 26 April 1923 that Brett was the author.
11. Neither of these titles is listed in either the *Finding List* or its predecessor, the *Union List of Serials in New Zealand Libraries*.
12. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 16 February 1937. The papers of the Department of Internal Affairs relating to this matter, formerly at National Archives (IA1, 21/100/43), were destroyed in 1959.
13. For example, J. E. Traue's *New Zealand Studies: A Guide to Bibliographic Resources* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985), pp. 12-13. In the same work Traue notes that in New Zealand, unlike most other countries, the periodical literature (including newspapers) assumed early a significance in comparison with monographic publications, and is consequently of considerable importance (pp. 12, 27).
14. Wellington: Government Printer, 1969-1985. 5 v.
15. A. G. Bagnall, 'National bibliography 1890- : a progress report', *New Zealand Libraries*, v. 22, no. 5 (July 1959), pp. 101-105.

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